ELTON JOHN PLAYS GAMES WITH RAY FOX-CUMMING

BEYOND THE BED IN THE WALL

IT SMACKED of Hitchcock, "Marnie" or the Marie Celeste. A luxury suite high up in London's Inn On The Park Hotel — empty, abandoned with breakfast crockery still cluttering the surface of a coffee table. French windows leading to a balcony overlooking Park Lane flung wide open with net curtains billowing to let in a force ten draught.

Where, oh where, had the superstar gone? Over the balcony to end it all? Pushed over? Blown over? Actually, none such fate, it's just Elton John messing about. A white-suited figure emerges from hiding in a corner of the balcony, gets entangled in the net curtains and falls giggling into the room.

Excitedly he plots an even better entrance for his next interview. The suite has beds that fold up into the wall and he intends to constrict himself behind one of them and fling it and himself out into the room at the right moment.

"Hope he isn't late though," he muses with a worried frown, "I'll die of asphixiation in the bedding."

As he looks forward to perpetrating this ruse with a schoolboy's delight, he says that he's enjoying life as never before. "And I said three years ago that I'd be retired by now—a man of many contradictions."

PEAK

His happiness springs from the success of his album "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road", which he views as the peak of his career so far, and he's delighted that the critics agree with him.

Why had he made a double album?

"Well, when we went to the Chateau, Bernie (Taupin) had a massive number of songs and I wrote music for them all. Then I said to my producer, Gus Dudgeon, 'wouldn't it be great to do a double' and Gus was doubtful because double albums are not usually very good. I said 'let's record them all anyway' so we did and after Gus had heard them all he said 'let's do it'."

So what lies beyond the yellow brick road? Another album to be recorded in January high up in the mountains of Denver, Colorado "At a place called the Caribou Ranch, which is owned by Jimmy Gorcio. It's really luxurious and full of antiques—quite breathtaking. He has one studio there and I think he's going to build another one. Really he has it just for his own pleasure and lets friends use it. Joe Walsh and Rick Derringer have done albums there.

"The only thing you have to get used to is that it's so high up you have to keep gasping for breath all the time."

But why forsake the Chateau D'Herouville where he's made albums so successfully in the past?

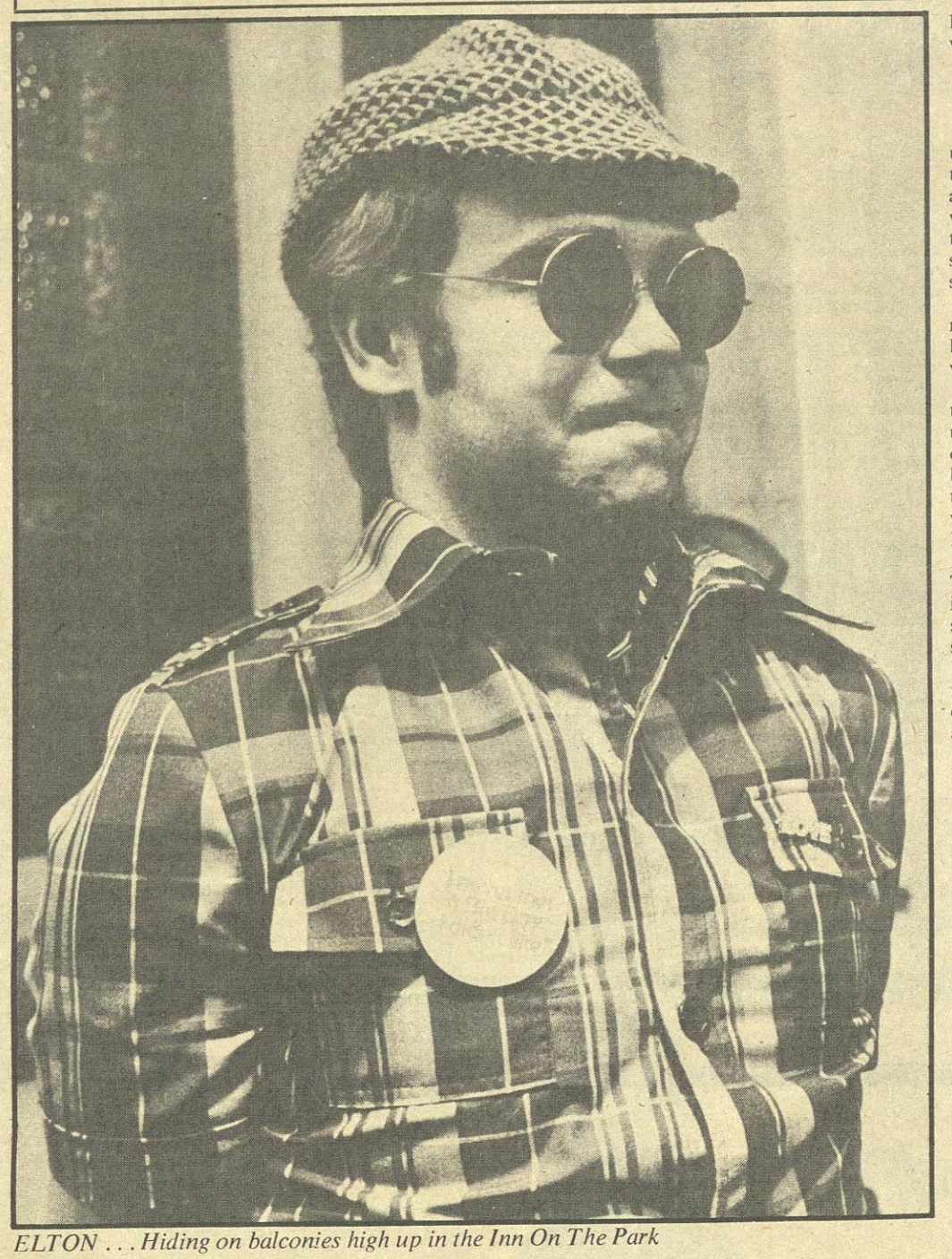
"Even if we didn't go to Denver, we'd go somewhere else this time, because we've done four albums at the Chateau and, although it's great, it's time for a change."

Is the next album written?

"No, you're joking, I don't write albums till I go to the place. I wrote all 17 songs on "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road" in three days. I always write like that. Gus goes paranoid about it.

"For instance, our next single *Step Into Christmas* was written on Sunday morning, recorded in the afternoon and it's out a week later."

Surely this way of working must mean that the band are kicking their heels in the studio waiting for songs to work on?



ELTON . . . Hiding on balconies high up in the Inn On The Park

EMBRYO

"Yes it does sometimes, but I usually get up very early before they do and write before they appear. I like to write songs when the band's rehearsing though, because you then see the songs from the very embryo stage."

One person who often does not see the songs from the beginning is Bernie Taupin, who writes the lyrics for them.

"Bernie often writes the lyrics then hears no more of the songs until they are on record. He does occasionally pop into the studios, but there's really nothing for him to do and to stay there for three weeks would be very boring for him."

A change in the pattern of the Taupin/John writing partnership is imminent. Recently they've seen little of each other, Taupin submitting his lyrics from his Lincolnshire retreat to Elton, not more than an hour's drive from capital city. But now Bernie's acquired a second residence to become Elton's near-neighbour at Virginia Water so they'll be working more closely together in future.

"Bernie's a very deep person. He's one of my best friends but I don't really know what goes on inside his mind. Sometimes I ask him if a certain song is about a certain person or something like that, but I don't get any sense out of him. He just shrugs his shoulders and won't say."

As well as a change in the John/Taupin modus operandi, there's to be a change of approach for the next album, which Bernie wants to call "Stinker".

NEW MEMBER

"I'm trying to add a new member to the band," says Elton for starters. "I can't say who, because they're still involved with another band. I don't feel we're getting stale by any means, but a new person gives you new life. When Davey joined us it was such a kick.

"Also I'd like to use other people on the recordings. It's easy in America, because there are so many people just an hour or two away." He won't be tied down to saying definitely who might contribute to "Stinker" or whatever title it eventually bears, but would like his new-found friend Stevie Wonder to be involved.

He also wants to write for other artists next year. "We did a couple of things for Kiki Dee's album, but that's about all."

The name of Kiki Dee brought us round to talking about Rocket, the record label of which he owns a fifth, who are now in the throes of signing a fair number of new names. With Kiki's single *Amoureuse* Rocket are now enjoying their first hit. "Kiki's success means more to me than anything I've done this year—the American tour, the album, anything.

"Six months ago she wouldn't have said boo to a goose, but now she's completely changed. If anybody deserved success, she does. She's paid her dues all right.

"She came along with these four songs of hers and apologised that they weren't very good, but they're the best things on her album—better than the stuff Bernie and I did for her."

As far as the immediate future is concerned, Elton's out on tour here until Christmas with special festive concerts lined up for Hammersmith "with lots of Christmas trees and things."

SILLIEST GROUP

"Everyone will be out trying to be the silliest group at Christmas," he exclaims gleefully. "Good evening, good evening, wassail, wassail."

Outside the music business, Elton still finds time for interests "to stop me going crazy". He fills up his home with assorted items of art deco, keeps a watchful eye on the National Youth Theatre, of which he's Vice-President, "though I've rather neglected them this year" and is a very active Vice-President of Watford Town Football Club.

"You just have to have outside interests. Musicians who talk of nothing but music are so boring." Elton John is in no danger of becoming boring.

● **STOP PRESS: Elton's entrance from the bed in the wall went off perfectly, but the victim was not amused. Thought you might like to know . . .**